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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001851

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: MIL-MIL RELATIONS: MOD OPTIMISTIC, DESPITE SIGNS

REF: A. DAO REPORT SCI 6 808 0280 08 - DRASTIC CHANGES
IN US/BOL MIL-MIL RELATIONS EXPECTED
WITHOUT APOLOGY
[1](#)B. DAO REPORT 6 808 0276 08 - J2 REASSINGED TO
CONTRABAND TASK FORCE NEAR DESAGUADERA
[1](#)C. LA PAZ 1425
[1](#)D. LA PAZ 1023
[1](#)E. LA PAZ 99

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel told EmbOffs August 22 that mil-mil relations are "good" and poised to improve following President Evo Morales' lead to improve relations generally. San Miguel said "misunderstandings" are at the root of mutual suspicions of USG and Bolivian government intentions. He said Morales might be ready to reconsider restrictions he placed on military assistance following a perceived slight from SouthCom Admiral James Stavridis and that even lifting a preexisting ban on training to WHINSEC was a possibility.

[1](#)2. (C) However, San Miguel's assessment is at odds with other recent indicators from our contacts. Morales continues to restrict U.S. assistance and Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana told the military to replace all U.S.-sponsored military training. Furthermore, the Bolivian Chief of Military Intelligence was reassigned for attending U.S. training; our training candidates are facing increased resistance obtaining GOB permissions; and Morales personally rejected in-country travel for our new Defense Attache. End Summary.

MOD Paints Rosy Mil-Mil Future

[1](#)3. (C) Minister of Defense (MOD) Walker San Miguel told EmbOffs August 22 that mil-mil relations would "continue as they always have" and that Bolivian delays in providing participants or canceling participation in USG-sponsored training were "a question of (administrative) discipline," not a signal of deliberate distancing from U.S. military assistance. "It is a reality that we need U.S. help," said San Miguel, emphasizing that the Bolivian government would be counting on U.S. help as it attempts to increase counter-narcotics efforts in the Yungas region, a "new challenge." San Miguel was optimistic relations would

improve following positive visits by WHA A/S Thomas Shannon and INL A/S David Johnson in July and August, respectively. "Evo wants to improve relations," San Miguel said.

Explanations Needed to Defeat "Misunderstandings"

¶4. (C) Regarding the long-stalled agreement to provide status of forces guarantees for U.S. servicemen and DOD civilians working on humanitarian projects, San Miguel said there was "still hope" for a 2009 agreement. (Note: President Morales froze the 2008 agreement and Bolivian participation in certain USG-funded courses following Admiral James Stavridis' January 17 presentation to the Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS), which Morales (incorrectly) says portrayed him as linked to narco-terrorism due to use of a photo of Morales with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. End Note.) San Miguel told us he would approach the subject with Morales. He opined the time might be right "to put this behind us" following a well-received explanation of the "misunderstanding" from Stavridis relayed to Morales from Armed Forces Commander Luis Trigo in June. He added, however, that such private explanations needed to be made public. (Note: We understand that Admiral Stavridis is considering meeting with San Miguel at the Defense Ministerial of the Americas (DMA) the first week of September in Banff, Canada. End Note.)

We Can't Go On Together, With Suspicious Minds

¶5. (C) San Miguel lamented that "misunderstandings" are at the core of suspicions from other ministries and President Morales himself about the motives of U.S. military assistance. He complained that the bullets case, in which the former MILGP Commander had attempted to bring 500 rounds of ammunition to Bolivia for target shooting via a friend of the family last year, "caused me a lot of problems." San Miguel said although "there was nothing to it," the incident enflamed mistrust and could have been avoided if the MILGP Commander had "simply asked me to authorize it."

Reality vs. San Miguel

¶6. (C) Despite San Miguel's assurances to the contrary, all indications are that mil-mil relations are on the decline:

--According to MILGP and EcoPol contacts, the military asked for President Evo Morales' permission on August 18 to send 11 Bolivian officers to U.S.-sponsored peace keeping operations (PKO) training in Uruguay that begins the last week of September. Bringing a routine training authorization to Morales' level during Evo's weekly MOD/Military working group meeting is unusual and reveals how reluctant commanders have become to make independent decisions that concern the United States. J-3 (operations) Commander General Walter Ponozo and his aides asked various Embassy officials for any correspondence "like an apology" or, barring that, an explanation concerning Stavridis' presentation in order to present it as an attachment to the training request, apparently anticipating the question. EcoPol provided Diplomatic Note 034/08, which provides an explanation of Stavridis' presentation. Morales apparently made no decision on the subject, but reiterated that he was still waiting for a clear apology from Stavridis.

--Later on August 18, Presidency Minister Juan Ramon Quintana called General Ponozo to tell him in no uncertain terms to start looking for military training in other countries, mentioning Venezuela, Cuba, China, and Argentina. Quintana allegedly said the Bolivian government would pay for alternatives in other countries to replace U.S.-sponsored training. Ponozo told our DAO he will continue pressing for the PKO candidates, but opined that the training would eventually be canceled and that any training to the U.S., even within the scope of maintenance and repair, was also slated to be replaced.

--In June, seven Bolivian servicemen scheduled to compete in a Special Forces competition in San Antonio, Texas were pulled off the plane at the last minute at the behest of Quintana, according to our contacts. San Miguel explained this incident as a "routine technical issue," saying the service commanders had not received proper clearance from MOD and that MOD was trying to send a message that it would not approve such requests after the fact, which had occurred in the past. Despite the fact that the USG pays for the training, transportation, and usually provides food and lodging, San Miguel explained the soldiers in this case also did not receive authorization for per diem from the Bolivian government for official overseas duty and "we don't have the money to send everyone." (Comment: This is bunk. When given a choice, Bolivian soldiers routinely forego this overseas pay as a pittance not worth the bureaucratic effort and certainly not worth missing out on an opportunity to receive U.S. training. End Comment.)

--Upon returning from a U.S.-sponsored training course at the Strategic Intelligence Congress in Orlando, Florida in August, Bolivian Chief of Military Intelligence (J2) General Eradio Ardaya was reassigned to an inconsequential counter-contraband post in remote Desaguadero near the Peruvian border. According to DAO reporting (ref b), Armed Forces Commander Luis Trigo told him the reassignment was punishment for going on training to the U.S. without his permission. Ardaya obtained the permission of the Vice-Commander, as Trigo was out of the country at the time, and considers this an excuse to replace him with a more politically malleable officer that will be less critical of Trigo and the government.

--MILGP is experiencing increased delays obtaining candidate lists for USG-sponsored training from the military. Potential candidates report encountering resistance obtaining the required paperwork and permissions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (diplomatic notes for travel, the first incident reported in ref d), the Ministry of Defense, and within their own services.

--Although potentially still in play, the MOD appears to have caved to MFA resistance on approving an agreement on end-use monitoring that would provide \$6 million in fund for Bolivian peace keepers over FY08 and FY09 (septel).

--Morales personally denied our request for an orientation trip for Embassy's new Defense Attache to visit Bolivian military units throughout the country (a routine practice). General Trigo told RO that San Miguel was not opposed to the trip, but did not stand up to Morales on the subject. Apparently, Trigo did not object either.

"We Will Improve" Training Glitches; Even WHINSEC Possible

17. (C) San Miguel told us he would look personally into the case of a Major Jorge Cadima, who is due to attend training at the end of September. (Note: San Miguel made good on this promise and Cadima's paperwork problems were resolved. End Note.) San Miguel said there was no "intention to slow the process, (or) restrict training," but rather that the new military high command, specifically Trigo, was organizationally challenged. We asked that the relevant services inform us if training is to be canceled, as unfilled spots cost us 70 percent of the course costs and 100 percent of unused plane tickets. San Miguel advised we copy the Defense Ministry on all training correspondence with the military to avoid "misunderstandings" and ensure prompt turnaround on candidate nominations, noting that Vice MOD Wilfredo Vargas had made this suggestion previously. San Miguel promised "we will improve on this."

18. (C) San Miguel said a ban on military training at WHINSEC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation; formally the School of the Americas; ref e) was the only restriction on Bolivian participation in USG-sponsored

training; "the rest is fine." San Miguel explained that "WHINSEC is a special case," because "NGOs were telling us to stay away, some from your own country." Even the WHINSEC ban, said San Miguel, could be reconsidered and overturned, a prospect VMOD Vargas has made to us several times. "Service commanders want very much to resume this training."

The Military Stands Up to Evo, Not

¶9. (C) Our DAO has received information that Air Force Commander General Daniel Salazar said during a recent U.S. military conference that he was drafting a letter on behalf of all service commanders to ask President Evo Morales to resign to prevent a violent conflict from developing in Bolivia and criticizing his leadership for unnecessarily dividing the country. Salazar verified with RO that he did in fact make the comment, but that he could not get the other commanders, and especially General Trigo, to sign the letter.

He was not disposed to sending a letter solely on his own behalf. We suspect that although the anti-Morales sentiment is likely true, it is unlikely he ever seriously approached the other commanders to send such a letter. RO suspects Salazar avoided meeting with him due to morning-after reluctance (or fear) to discuss the statement.

Comment

¶10. (C) MOD San Miguel's sunny optimism about the future of mil-mil relations in the face of solid evidence to the contrary calls into question either his grasp on reality or his willingness to get real with us. Relations are not business as usual (refs c through e). We do not doubt San Miguel would like our mil-mil relations to be on a positive, or at least an even, track, but he has to be aware of steadily growing negative influence of Quintana on military affairs and Trigo's acquiesce to the same. While we continue to view San Miguel, Vargas, and most senior-ranking officers as favorably disposed to solid mil-mil relations, we are increasingly skeptical that these erstwhile "allies" will stick their necks out to achieve them.

¶11. (C) A Stavridis apology is a red herring -- or yet another attempt by Evo and Quintana to show up the U.S. There is a movement afoot led by Quintana and other government radicals to distance Bolivia from the USG that is beyond the power of logic and explanation to reverse. Stavridis' January 17 presentation was used to justify decisions and a direction already well underway. End Comment.
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